Pacific Northwest English

Pacific Northwest English (also known, in American linguistics, as **Northwest English**)[1] is a variety of North American English spoken in the U.S. states of Washington and Oregon, sometimes also including Idaho and the Canadian province of British Columbia.[2] Current studies remain inconclusive about whether Pacific Northwest English is a dialect of its own, separate from Western American English or even California English or Standard Canadian English,[3] with which it shares its major phonological features.[4] The dialect region contains a highly diverse and mobile population, which is reflected in the historical and continuing development of the variety.

Pacific Northwest English	
Region	Northwestern United States (Oregon, Northern California and Washington) and Western Canada (British Columbia)
Language family	Indo-European ▪ Germanic ▪ West Germanic ▪ North Sea Germanic ▪ Anglo-Frisian ▪ Anglic ▪ English ▪ North American English ▪ American English ▪ Western American English ▪ **Pacific Northwest English**
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	–

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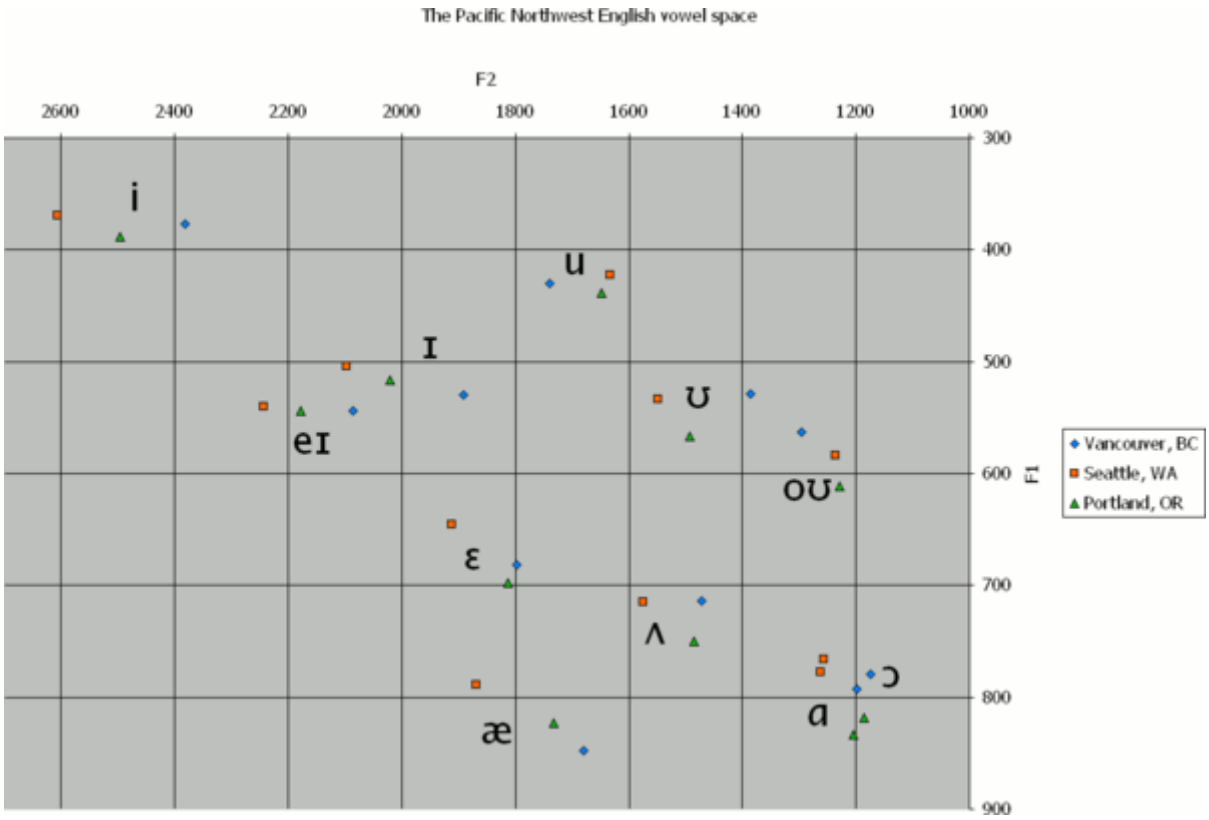
History

The linguistic traits that flourish throughout the Pacific Northwest attest to a culture that transcends boundaries. Historically, this hearkens back to the early years of colonial expansion by the British and Americans, when the entire region was considered a single area and people of all different mother tongues and nationalities used Chinook Jargon (along with English and French) to communicate with each other. Until the Oregon Treaty of 1846, it was identified as being either Oregon Country (by the Americans) or Columbia (by the British).[5]

Linguists immediately after World War II tended to find few patterns unique to the Western region, as among other things, Chinook Jargon and other "slang words" (despite Chinook Jargon being an actual separate language in and of itself, individual words from it like "salt chuck", "muckamuck", "siwash" and

"tyee" were and still are used in Pacific Northwest English) were pushed away in favour of having a "proper, clean" dialect.[6] Several decades later, linguists began noticing emerging characteristics of Pacific Northwest English, although it remains close to the standard American accent.

Phonology



The Pacific Northwest English vowel space. Based on TELSUR data from Labov et al. The /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ are indistinguishable in the F1/F2 means for three speakers from Vancouver, British Columbia, two speakers from Seattle, and three from Portland, Oregon

Commonalities with both Canada and California

- Pacific Northwest English has all the phonological mergers typical of North American English and, more specifically, all the mergers typical of Western American English, including the *cot–caught* merger.
- Younger speakers of Pacific Northwest English also show features of the Canadian/California Vowel Shift, which move front vowels through a lowering of the tongue:
  - /æ/ is retracted toward almost [a]; /ɛ/ toward almost [æ]; and /ɪ/ toward almost [ɛ]. Therefore, among younger speakers, *hick* can sound like *heck*, *heck* like *hack*, and *hack* like *hock*.
  - /ɑ/ is backed and sometimes rounded to become [ɒ]. Most Pacific Northwest speakers have undergone the *cot–caught* merger. A notable exception occurs with some speakers born before roughly the end of World War II.

Commonalities with Canada

These commonalities are shared with Canada and the North Central United States which includes the Minnesota accent.

- Traditional and older speakers may show certain vowels, such as [oʊ] as in *boat* and [eɪ] as in *bait*, with qualities much closer to monophthongs than diphthongs as in the rest of the country.
- There are also conditional raising processes of open front vowels. These processes are often more extreme than in Canada and the North Central United States.
  - Before the velar nasal [ŋ], /æ/ becomes [e]. This change makes for minimal pairs such as *rang* and *rain*, both having the same vowel [e], differing from *rang* [ræŋ] in other varieties of English.
  - Among some speakers in Portland and southern Oregon, /æ/ is sometimes raised and diphthongized to [eə] or [ɪə] before the nasal consonants [m] and [n]. This is typical throughout the country.
  - /ɛ/, and, in the northern Pacific Northwest, /æ/, become [eɪ] before the voiced velar plosive /g/: *egg* and *leg* are pronounced to rhyme with *plague* and *vague*, a feature shared by many northern Midwestern dialects and with the Utah accent. In addition, sometimes bag will be pronounced *bayg*.[7]
    - While /æ/ raising is present in both Canadian and Pacific Northwest English, differences exist between the groups most commonly presenting these features. /æ/ raising is more common in younger Canadian speakers and less common in younger Washingtonian speakers.[8]

Commonalities with California

- Back vowels of the California Shift: The Canadian/California Shift developing in Pacific Northwest English also includes these additional features only reminiscent of California English, but not Canadian English (especially among working-class young-adult females):[9]
  - The close central rounded vowel [ʉ] or close back unrounded vowel [ɯ] for /u/, is found in Portland and some areas of Southern Oregon, but is generally not found further north, where the vowel remains the close back rounded [u].
  - In speakers born around the 1960s, there is a tendency to move the tongue forward in the first element of the diphthong /oʊ/. This is reminiscent also of Midland, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern U.S. English.[10] This fronting does not appear before /m/ and /n/, for example, in the word *home*.[11]
- Absence of Canadian raising: For most speakers, both /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ remain lax before voiceless obstruents, although some variation has been reported. This likens the Pacific Northwest accent with Californian accents, and contrasts it with Canadian and some other American dialects (such as Philadelphia English).

Miscellaneous characteristics

- Some speakers perceive or produce the pairs /ɛn/ and /ɪn/ close to each other,[12] for example, resulting in a merger between *pen* and *pin*, most notably in Eugene, Oregon and Spokane, Washington.[13]
- Consonant phonology is more conservative, as with other varieties of English.

Lexicon

Several English terms originated in or are largely unique to the region:

- *cougar:* mountain lion
- *duff:* forest litter[14]
- *tolo:* Sadie Hawkins dance[15]
- *(high) muckamuck:* an important person or person of authority, usually a pompous one (from Chinook Jargon, where it means "eats a lot; much food")
- *potato bug:* woodlouse[16]
- *salt chuck:* the ocean (from Chinook Jargon, where it means "salt water" or "the ocean"; today used on the radio).
- *spendy:* expensive[17]
- *sunbreak:* a passage of sunlight in the clouds during dark, rainy weather (typical west of the Cascade Mountains)[18]
- *spodie:* an outdoor high school party at which a mixture of alcoholic beverages (often with chopped fruit added as well) is sold by the cup and drunk (largely unique to the Seattle area).

See also

- Chain shift
- California English
- Canadian English
- General American English
- Vowel Shift
- British Columbian English
- Chinook Jargon
- Chinook Jargon use by English Language speakers

Notes

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2. Riebold, John M. (2012). "Please Merge Ahead: The Vowel Space of Pacific Northwestern English" (https://web.archive.org/web/20150928152327/http://students.washington.edu/riebold/files/Riebold%202012%20-%20Please%20Merge%20Ahead.pdf#page=2) (PDF). *Northwest Linguistics Conference 28*. University of Washington. p. 2. Archived from the original (http://students.washington.edu/riebold/files/Riebold%202012%20-%20Please%20Merge%20Ahead.pdf#page=2) (PDF) on September 28, 2015.
3. Ward (2003:87): "lexical studies have suggested that the Northwest in particular forms a unique dialect area (Reed 1957, Carver 1987, Wolfram and Shilling-Estes 1998). Yet the phonological studies that could in many ways reinforce what the lexical studies propose have so far been less confident in their predictions".
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5. Meinig, Donald W. (1995) [1st pub. 1968]. *The Great Columbia Plain* (Weyerhaeuser Environmental Classic ed.). University of Washington Press. p. 104. ISBN 978-0-295-97485-9.
6. Wolfram and Ward 2006, pg. 140

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10. Conn, Jeff (2002). *An investigation into the western dialect of Portland Oregon* (http://www.pds.pdx.edu/Publications/NWAV31.htm). Paper presented at NWAV 31, Stanford, California. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20151121011733/http://www.pds.pdx.edu/Publications/NWAV31.htm) from the original on November 21, 2015.
11. Ward (2003:44)
12. Labov, Ash, Boberg 2006
13. Labov et al. 2006. p. 68.
14. Raftery, Isolde (December 23, 2014). *A brief history of words unique to the Pacific Northwest* (https://web.archive.org/web/20150921233420/http://kuow.org/post/brief-history-words-unique-northwest). KUOW. Archived from the original (http://kuow.org/post/brief-history-words-unique-northwest) on September 21, 2015. "Duff = The decaying vegetable matter, especially needles and cones, on a forest floor.
Fish wheel = A wheel with nets, put in a stream to catch fish; sometimes used to help fish over a dam or waterfall."
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17. *Do You Speak American? § Pacific Northwest* (https://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/pacificnorthwest/). PBS. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20150723233207/http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/pacificnorthwest/) from the original on July 23, 2015. "As Portlanders continue to front their back vowels, they will continue to *go to the coast* (*geow* to the *ceowst*), not the beach or the shore, as well as to microbrews, used clothing stores (where the clothes are not too *spendy* (expensive), bookstores (*bik*-stores) and coffee shops (both words pronounced with the same vowel)."
18. Champagne, Reid (February 8, 2013). "Solar neighborhood projects shine in 'sunbreak' Seattle" (http://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/solar-neighborhood-projects-shine-in-lsquosunbreakrsquo-seattle/). *The Seattle Times*. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20151121011841/http://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/solar-neighborhood-projects-shine-in-lsquosunbreakrsquo-seattle/) from the original on November 21, 2015. Retrieved May 29, 2013. "[I]n this part of the world . . . sunshine is more frequently reported as 'sunbreaks'."

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Further reading

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- *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Suzanne Romaine, 2000. Oxford University Press.
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External links

- Hear Pacific Northwest English (http://accent.gmu.edu/searchsaa.php?function=detail&speakerid=572)
- Phonological Atlas of North America (http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/home.html)

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